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PRACTICAL METHODS OF DEVELOPING A COMMERCIAL PECAN ORCHARD.

A paper read before the Annual Convention of the
National Pecan Growers Association.

(Reprint from The American Nut Journal.)

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In practical foresightedness the pecan grower is superior to the ordinary horticulturist in that he is willing to forego near-by profits for those which are more stable and more lasting, though they may not come so soon. Grapes and peaches run their course in from ten to fifteen years; apples and oranges become decrepit in from forty to sixty years; while pecans are in the prime of life when they are one hundred to two hundred years old.

Futhermore, the grower of most other horticultural products has to race with the weather, delayed train schedules and vacillating markets. Not so with the pecan grower. If he is not ready to gather his nuts in October, they are just as good in November; and if the November market is not to his liking, he can save them without deterioration for the usual bare market of the next season. Nature has given this queen of nuts a shell which protects it from air, dust and dirt, making it one of the cleanest as well as one of the most quickly available foods in all the realm of horticulture. By using cold storage, there is the further advantage of being able to carry over any surplus from a full crop year with a probable sagging market to the following one when prices may be better.

A word here as to the returns which may be expected from a pecan orchard when it becomes established, in other words, when it is from fifteen years old and upward. Years of experience have convinced me that the net average yearly income per acre

for such an orchard may be reasonably placed at one hundred dollars. This estimate is based on an average annual yield of 600 pounds of nuts which should sell at an average price of 25c per pound. This will allow \$50.00 per year for cultivation, fertilizer, seed for cover crops, spraying, harvesting nuts, etc., leaving \$100.00 as the net profit. This estimate has been often surpassed, though in most cases it has not been equaled, for the reason that we have not yet gotten away from the old idea that there is nothing to do but set pecan trees, go to sleep for eight or ten years, and then wake up and find a profitable orchard. Let me emphasize the statement that such a proposition has never yet been discovered in horticulture, agriculture, or in any other business or professional line, and it never will be. Six thousand years ago the law was laid down that "by the sweat of thy face shalt thou earn thy bread," and this law has not been repealed. It is an inexcusable economic waste to set trees, and then have them fail for lack of proper care.

What, then, are the points necessary to success with pecans? Briefly they are as follows:—

SUITABLE LAND. Fifty per cent and more of the lands in the cotton belt will grow pecans successfully. This land should be such that it can be built up and maintained in a high state of fertility. It should contain a good per cent of humus, which should be kept up by regularly turning under leguminous and other crops. A crop as valuable as pecans deserves the best land obtainable. Where other necessary points are observed, such land will insure paying crops of nuts; whereas unsuitable land foreshadows a greater or less degree of failure. It is better to pay \$100.00 per acre for the best land than to have the poor as a gift. The following kinds of land should be avoided:—

- (a) Deep, poor sandy land.
- (b) Washed-off hillsides.
- (c) Land underlaid with clay which is practically impervious to moisture.
- (d) Low wet lands which do not dry off sufficiently to

grow cotton or corn successfully. Lands which occasionally overflow but which dry off sufficiently to become easily tillable, are well suited to pecans. These fertile creek and river bottoms have been nature's favorite planting ground for pecan nut trees.

GOOD TREES. To set a dwarfish, runty tree practically nullifies all hope of producing a profitable orchard. Only vigorous healthy trees should be set. An inferior tree even as a gift will prove a costly investment. Under best conditions and measured by a reasonable return on the amount, each tree should when fifteen years old and upward be worth from \$50 to \$500.00. But don't expect to realize even the lowest of these figures if poor trees are set. We don't buy shoddy when we want results in other lines; why do so with pecans?

VARIETIES. A commercial orchard preferably contains from two to four varieties. It is very important that these should be wisely chosen. As the pecan ultimately reaches such size as is difficult to spray completely, only those varieties should be selected that are freest from insect and fungus troubles. Scab is probably the worst of the fungus diseases. Some varieties seem especially subject to scab, while others are practically immune.

Pecans also have their adaptabilities to latitude, soil, climate, etc., and for this reason those suited to one section may not be best for another. The following are among the varieties that are making good records, some in wider, others in more restricted sections: Stuart, Schley, Moneymaker, Frotscher, Success, Pabst, and Moore.

CULTIVATION. It is best to grow some crop among trees until they come to the profitable bearing age. Small grain should be avoided, unless it is to be turned under before growth starts in the trees in the early spring. With this exception almost any other crop may be grown. Proper rotation of crops including frequent use of legumes should be followed so as to keep the soil well filled with vegetable matter. Whatever crops are grown should be highly fertilized, and the trees will get their

share of the plant food. Keep the land constantly on the up-grade so far as fertility is concerned.

After trees have come to the age where they are yielding profitable returns, which usually is in from eight to ten years after they are set, it is likely best to cultivate only for the good of the trees. At this time, a winter cover crop followed by a summer cover crop, both to be turned under, is good. The former may be small grain or a winter legume; the latter may be beggar weed, peas, or velvet beans. Most experienced orchardists prefer the last named. From 400 to 800 lbs. per acre of a high grade fertilizer should be applied broad-cast to one or the other of these crops, preferably in the spring. Under this treatment good growth of trees should be had, and profitable yields of nuts as well. The pecan is not a regular annual bearer, a full crop being generally followed by one which is more or less short. But where the fertility of the soil is well maintained not only larger but more regular crops will be harvested.

Trees do not thrive on lands which are used as permanent pastures. Under this treatment not only does the ground become compact and so loses some of its moisture-holding capacity, but grazing removes food elements which are not fully restored in the droppings from the animals. You must feed your trees if you expect them to feed you.

If the above suggestions together with others which occur to every sensible grower are followed then profitable orchards will result. The pecan offers no royal road to wealth. But when all the factors of production, marketing, supply, demand, etc., are considered, I know of no more promising horticultural field than that offered by this, the best of all the nut family.

One caution in conclusion:— Don't set more trees than will be cared for in the best manner, no matter whether this be a few trees around the home, or a commercial orchard of hundreds of acres. Do this and your trees will from year to year be an increasing source of pleasure and profit, though you live to be a hundred years old.